

## **Should the First Year Count? GPA consultation October/November 2012**

In October 2012 the Education Network asked School Education Reps to gather feedback on whether the first year should count towards final degree classification. This was as a result of a paper to Quality and Standards committee considering a number of issues surrounding the implementation of Grade Point Average. At this point, approximately half of the School Education Rep positions were filled meaning that full coverage of all Schools/ Departments was not available. We gathered feedback from the following Schools and Departments:

### ***Arts***

English  
Music  
Russian and Slavonic Studies

### ***Social Science***

Geography  
Nottingham University Business School  
Sociology and Social Policy

### ***Science***

Biology  
Biosciences  
Computer Science  
Pharmacy  
Physics and Astronomy  
Psychology

### ***Medicine & Health Sciences***

GEM/Healthcare Sciences  
Nursing (Diploma, Derby)  
Physiotherapy  
Medicine

Research methods used by Schools/Depts. varied however this report summarizes the overall feeling on whether the first year should count including any divergence in opinion by Faculty. It is important to note that no responses were received from the Faculty of Engineering.

Well over 1000 students provided feedback on the issue of 1<sup>st</sup> year counting. Over two thirds of these respondents felt that the first year should **not** count towards the final degree classification. The key reasons provided for this include:

### ***Essay based subjects / Science backgrounds***

Some of these subjects did not require taking essay based subjects at A Level so the first year involved a steep learning curve.

“Some students have no science background and need the year to get up to level with everyone else” (Biosciences)

“It would be unjust to make first year count as some students haven’t studied Psychology before or studied an essay based subject since GCSE leaving them at a disadvantage if the first year was to count” (Psychology)

### ***Induction/ getting used to University***

“University is a shock to the system. The 1<sup>st</sup> year is what we consider a prep year for the remaining 2 years” (Sociology and Social Policy)

“International students (particularly those from non-EU countries) need the time to adjust to the new culture and language” (Biosciences)

### ***Foreign Languages (Russian and Slavonic Studies)***

The first year allows language ability to ‘level out’. Students come to University with A Levels from a variety of exam boards that put emphasis on different aspects of language learning.

Students commencing language study ab initio already have a high level of pressure on them. Making the first year count would add to this.

### ***Compulsory modules***

“The first year modules are largely chosen for you and therefore are not necessarily something that you have a strong interest in studying” (Geography)

“Students may be doing compulsory first year modules that they wouldn't choose if given the choice” (Biology)

Where students were **in favour** of the 1<sup>st</sup> year counting, the following reasons were popular:

### ***Cost of degree***

“I feel as if first year should count especially as students will be paying £9000 per year, it is a waste of a year and money if not all the years count” (Sociology and Social Policy)

“Paying for a year which counts for nothing seems unfair” (Psychology)

### ***Progression***

“As a student who failed a number of modules in first year but performed well in the summer re-sits, I would say a very huge YES to first year results counting. I think it would help provide students with motivation to do better in their first year” (Nottingham University Business School)

“...I do think that it should count towards the final degree because for some students it may cause them to take the year more seriously if they know it can be the difference between a 1st or 2:1 or even a 2:2” (GEM)

## **Opinions from the Faculty of Medicine & Health Science**

Notably, students in the Faculty of Medicine and & Health Sciences were more positive about the prospect of the first year counting. In UG Medicine, the first year already counts and Nursing students asked about this were generally in favour. Physiotherapy students were almost split on whether it should count, and the opinion of GEM students reflected that of the wider view that it should not count. Some of the reasons given for having the first year count included:

“I think it is a very good idea....I don't see any reason why our first year shouldn't be counted towards our overall classification. It may help some of us and we have worked very hard to get our grades so far, so yes I think they should be considered” (Division of Nursing)

“I think that as long as there is sufficient Facilitator support then it is a reasonable idea”  
(Division of Nursing)

## **Views of current 1<sup>st</sup> years**

Interestingly, the School of English reported a divergence in the opinion of their first years. Whilst the feeling of English students as a whole was against the introduction of the first year counting, current 1<sup>st</sup> year students were broadly in favour of the move as they felt that their increased fee level meant that all of their study should contribute to the final classification. There was also an anecdotal report that students were attending more scheduled classes as a result of increased fees.

When I compared this finding to the School of Pharmacy (which was the only other School where it was possible to sort the data by year group) it was found that Pharmacy 1<sup>st</sup> years were more strongly against the introduction of 1<sup>st</sup> year counting than the overall feeling in the School.